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## Book Review: Journalism, Gender and Power

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### REVIEWED BOOK

Carter C, Steiner L. and Allan S. Eds. 2019. *Journalism, Gender and Power*. Abingdon, New York: Routledge.

### KEYWORDS

gender, journalism, inequality, inclusivity, power, women, LGBTQIA, news, patriarchy, media

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Like the previous collection first published in 1998, this edition includes both topical and high-profile stories such as the #MeToo movement and Black Lives Matter but also the covert but no less damaging and harmful actions and behaviours that compound gender inequalities. With an impressive breadth of subjects, the book sets out to build on familiar research themes including the influence of media ownership and control, sexism and women's employment to issues of politics and identities, gendered racialisation, cyber feminism and feminist discourses in a post-truth era.

The book highlights gender issues that relate also to ethnicity and race, age and physical appearance and sexual orientation. An important addition is the attention to the increased and often detrimental coverage of the LGBTQIA community across mass media. In so doing, it raises important questions about the role of social media as a progressive or harmful alternative platform to advance discourse on gender and representation.

By exploring this diverse range of issues from international perspectives, the book's central concern is about who makes the news, who sets the agenda and, importantly, who or what is excluded. The book posits that a lack of diversity leads to news that is written and presented based on the priorities of a particular patriarchal and heteronormative perspective

which in turn alienates parts of society and perpetuates patriarchy. While some chapters do acknowledge moves towards inclusivity, the dominant tone of the book is that systemic and embedded practices across journalism and the mass media are inhibiting women's progress in the sector with negative consequences for wider society.

The book is divided into four sections: Part 1: The Gendered Politics of News Production; Part 2: News Discourses, Sexualisation and Sexual Violence; Part 3: Engendering News Audiences and Activism; Part 4: Politics and Identities in the News. Each section includes chapters that address broad research interests within the given theme and from a range of perspectives. The combination of interesting research methods and approaches that are written in an engaging and accessible style are both stimulating and thought provoking. There is connectedness of subjects across the different sections of the book providing the reader with an interdisciplinary, international lens through which to view consistent themes in contrasting settings.

Part 1 explores the gendered politics of news production and highlights some of the hidden exercises of power across the sector. The chapter on women and technology in the newsroom highlights the covert perpetuation of negative gender stereotypes. By way of illustration, Usher (2019) gives the example of a person equating their lack of technical prowess of being like a Mum. This seemingly innocuous description aligns technical incompetence as a female trait and, as such, reproduces notions of technology as a male domain. In addition to specific sector examples, this section addresses the limited attention to equality and inclusivity policy in the sector. This lack of attention to inclusive policy and culture not only limits the progression of women to decision-making roles but also means that female talent across the sector is squandered. The section strongly asserts that this is not only an issue for news production but one that has negative impacts on society, business and culture as a whole.

Part 2 explores discourses in the news on sexualisation and sexual violence and critiques the role of the media in reproducing ideas about gender rather than challenging gender normativity. There are interesting questions about how celebrity and sensationalism gain media coverage for transgender stories that feature already established figures in the media such as Chelsea Manning and Caitlin Jenner. The section asserts that, although such stories are a platform for transgender discourses, coverage still links gender and sexual orientation as though they are synonymous, creates narrow 'wrong body' narratives and does not discuss gender diversity (Capuzza 2019). Visibility is also discussed within the context of the reporting of sexual violence. There is a worrying history (and, in some cases, it remains ongoing) of news coverage of rape, sexual violence, molestation and abuse either not being

covered or done so through a male perspective, often with cultural connections such as so-called corrective rape (Falkof 2019).

With its focus on engendering news audiences and activism, Part 3 addresses narrative construction and the role of the media in shaping common ideas about groups within society. Topics discussed in this section are diverse and include the representation of race rights and the cohabitation of refugees (Weber 2019), the invisibility of Arab women in political journalism (Mellor 2019) and the obstacles that Chinese women journalists face for career advancement (Wang 2019). Although this section has a broader global perspective, there are consistencies across countries in terms of the lack of women's contributions to the newsroom because of patriarchal discourse, limited advancement above entry-level jobs and the gendered aspects of promotion.

Part 4: Politics and Identities in the News discusses the role of social media as a platform for enabling misogyny, racial abuse and anti-feminist discourse in the public sphere. It asks an important question about the duality of the internet as both enabler of democratisation and hatred in a post-truth era. Social media gives rise to the 'amateur' displacing the 'expert' in public discourse, and concepts such as 'fake news' allow the dismissal of contrary and opposing views. The reporting of Hurricane Maria is used to explore how gender, news and power created racialised and gendered stereotypes of Puerto-Rican identity (Molina-Guzmán 2019). This section discusses the reporting of the US news coverage of women politicians focusing on Hillary Clinton's 2016 presidential campaign (Falk 2019) and includes interesting parallels to previous chapters that highlight a disproportionate number of female, particularly older female, political correspondents (Franks and Howell 2019).

As a collection, this book includes 21st century emergent concerns and high-profile movements such as #MeToo. As such, this edition is not only being timely and topical but also the sense of a step change. This collection not only highlights shortcomings within the sector, but in some instances also suggests useful and helpful steer that could help improve gender representation and difficult new gender discourse. This book is an important, illuminating and sobering read for anyone with an interest in gender equality, marginalisation, hidden exercises of power and embedded systems of privilege.

#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Kate Penney is a Doctoral Researcher in the Faculty of Social Sciences at the University of Sheffield. Her research interests include policy formation, regional inequalities, power dynamics and marginalisation. Kate has managed numerous projects in Further and Higher Education and is a Fellow of the Higher Education Academy.

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